

Addiction: a concept definition

[Literature](#)



Addiction is not only a psychological matter, it has several implications on the physiological aspects of the person addicted to substance or to anything that affects his general well-being. In this regard, this paper deals with the concept of addiction and will put forward several definitions of the concept as well as the factors that affect its occurrence in a person. Furthermore, it explores the implications of addiction on the practice of nursing and other healthcare delivery sectors so that nurses and health care practitioners in general would be able to deal more effectively with addiction.

It also presents a review of literature regarding addiction and a case of addiction that effectively illustrates the addiction, its consequences and implications. Addiction, although easily associated with substance abuse is related to the mental health of a person. At times, addiction is but a symptom of other deeper psychiatric morbidity. It is for this reason that the treatment of addiction is not only left to psychiatrists; rather treating it is a concerted effort for both nurses, doctors and psychiatrists.

Hence, the services in treating addiction are usually organized in various inter-disciplinary teams that look after the different stages of the treatment of a person suffering from various kinds of addiction (Lambert, 2002). Because the process of treating addiction is interdisciplinary, it follows that health care practitioners from different medical disciplines are affected by any program that seeks to treat addiction. The nursing profession is affected by the process of treating addiction.

In the first place, the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of different kinds of pain in patients that do have a problem with substance abuse become more difficult. Likewise, there are different social and cultural connotations

with addiction, which the addicted person and the health care professionals have to deal with in order to effectively deal with the person suffering from addiction. As such, nurses would have to coordinate with different health care professionals (Compton & Athanasos, 2003). True addiction should also be diagnosed properly and differentiated from conditions exhibiting the same symptoms.

Otherwise, the treatment will not be very effective. Those who are addicted to pain killers might suffer from relapse the moment that a healthcare practitioner used pain killers to them. Therefore, a set of criteria and guidelines in using pain killers, especially with people with history of substance abuse (Compton & Athanasos, 2003). Definition of Addiction
Addiction is the existence of an irrational urge in an individual to commit a certain activity even if such an activity is harmful to the health, mental state or social life of the person.

It is usually applied to addiction with harmful substances such as drugs and alcohol but it is also used in reference to addiction in gambling and excessive eating. The causes of addiction may be varied and may be found in the areas of genetic, biological and social experiences of the person engaging in these harmful activities (Lende & Smith, 2002). There are different forms of addiction. In broad terms, one manifests in physical dependence while the other is psychological. Physical Dependence

One of the defining characteristics of physical dependence is that when the use of the substance is discontinued, the addicted person experiences withdrawal symptoms. This kind of dependency is usually seen in opioids, benzodiazepines, barbiturates, alcohol and nicotine. Although this is the

case, the initial factor why a person uses a substance for addiction is their ability to produce pleasure. Over time, the inducement of pleasure becomes secondary to the purpose of relieving the anxiety caused by the lack of usage of the addictive substance.

Most addicted persons, however, are relieving the tension of their physical dependence while at the same time enjoying the pleasure brought about by using the substance. A number of substances, likewise, create physical dependence on the substance such as laxatives and antidepressants. Ironically, they do not induce addiction. However, when an addicted person stops using these substances, the brain, together with other physical functions, is affected greatly. The rate of addiction varies greatly from individual to individual. Yet, there are several factors that may explain the rate of addiction.

These factors include frequency of usage, the ways of ingestion, the level of pleasure of euphoria experienced by the person, psychological susceptibility of the person and the genetic makeup of the individual (Lende & Smith, 2002). Psychological Dependence Addiction may also be exhibited through the psychological dependency of a person. The withdrawal symptoms of psychological dependence are primarily psychological such as depression, insomnia, cravings and the like. In theory, addiction may be derived through the recurrence of behavior that present rewards, usually in the form of pleasure.

On the other hand, addiction may also be seen as a means to avoid undesirable activities or state of events in the life of an individual. More often, however, addiction is frequently displayed by people who have

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emotional, social or psychological problems. More often than not, physical and psychological dependence is exhibited in the addiction of a person (McLellan & Meyers, 2004) Defining Attributes of Addiction Based on the foregoing discussion on physical and psychological addiction, there are several defining attributes that may be associated for addiction.

For one, there is an element of pleasure. Whatever the motivation of an individual—whether it be for the purposes of escaping an undesirable situation or fulfilling one’s fantasy, the element of pleasure is present in the addiction. At the outset, the pursuit of pleasure, particularly in psychological dependence may appear to be harmless. But as the pleasure is sought after repeatedly, addiction sets in. the second defining attribute of addiction then is the recurrence or the repetition of the activity that induces pleasure.

The pursuit of the pleasure derived from the substance or activity will then gain an additional defining attribute. The addicted person will then experience anxiety and other physical or psychological withdrawal symptoms because of the lack of the substance in the body. In addition to this, the addicted person will have to repeatedly and more frequently use the addictive substance in order to relieve himself of the anxiety associated with the non-use of the substance. Another important defining attribute of addiction is the harm it causes to the individual addicted to a substance or any kind of activity.

Substance abuse carries with it different levels of physical harm in different organs of the body such as the lungs, the liver, and more dangerously, the brain for drugs that are injected intravenously. Psychological addiction to a particular activity such as gambling or online gaming may also affect the

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social life as well as the total well-being of an addicted person. A Case in Point: Nicotine Addiction and the Public Ban on Smoking One of the most common addictions in the world today is the addiction to nicotine. Because of several reasons, several public use facilities are ban smoking.

However, there has been an issue that surfaced regarding this matter. Although, the convenience of the general public is at stake and countless studies have demonstrated the ill effects of second-hand smoke, there are people who are mentally ill and physically dependent on nicotine (el-Guebaly, et. al. , 2002). Smokers derive pleasure from the act of smoking, they smoke repeatedly and regularly and they report experiencing withdrawal symptoms when they do not smoke. In individuals with schizophrenia, smoking is an even more serious problem as their health also suffers.

The defining characteristics of addiction are also present in schizophrenic people yet this is further confounded by incorrect treatment, conflicting knowledge and obsolete perceptions (McCloughen, 2003). Smoking may be seen by some as a harmless past-time or addiction, yet it is still an addiction that causes harm to the addicted person as well as to the people around him who inhale the second hand smoke that spews out of his mouth. Levels of Addiction Based on the defining characteristics discussed in the previous sections, addiction may be easily diagnosed through the recurrent engagement of a person in a particular activity.

Although, there is recurrent usage of a substance, such as alcohol, or a set of activity, addiction may not be present at all. Hence, it would be necessary to establish a criteria to set what truly may be considered as an addiction. For

one, repeated use may not necessarily be an addiction. There are social drinkers that may not be considered as alcoholics for the simple reason that they do not crave alcohol too much outside of the social sphere that they are exposed to. Secondly, eating disorders such as excessive eating may not necessarily be an addiction to food because there are different kinds of psychological factors at work there.

Hence, excessive eating may exhibit some of the symptoms or attributes of addiction yet it is not an addiction in itself. Lastly, there are instances of physical dependence that do not induce addiction. This is more frequently seen in the case of drugs that are needed in dampening the pain of patients that are engaged in the treatment of chronic pain. It is not their choice that they were exposed to the substance and they needed it, at least for a time, in order to solve a physical problem that they have.

Conclusion Addiction has been, and still is, a concern of health care professionals and of the society as a whole. Addiction harms the person who is addicted as well as the people surrounding such an individual. Addiction refers to the recurrent engagement of a person in the use of a substance or in an activity that gives him pleasure. Over the long term, however, the individual experiences anxiety and discomfort if such an addiction is stopped abruptly. Hence, health care practitioners should be able to determine cases of addiction and establish ways in effectively dealing and treating such an addiction. Through this, the harmful effects of addiction to individuals and to the society will be averted.